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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE 1381st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 1 August 1991, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. ALARCON DE QUESADA (Cuba)
(Vice-Chairman)

- Statement by the Chairman
- Requests for hearing
- Question of sending visiting missions to Territories
- Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories
- Organization of work

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In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Alarcon de Quesada (Cuba), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): I wish to begin by welcoming you to the resumed session of the Special Committee for this year. This session opens at a time when one of the most important questions on the agenda of our Committee, the question of Western Sahara, has entered a new phase. As you are aware, the implementation of the United Nations plan has begun, and it is our hope that the people of Western Sahara will soon exercise their right to self-determination, thereby closing the last chapter of that long-standing question.

While we are all gratified to note the progress achieved in that respect, we must bear in mind that on the road to complete decolonization by the year 2000, as set out in General Assembly resolution 43/47, we are still meeting a number of challenges. After the settlement of the question of Western Sahara, almost all the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories will be islands with specific and unique problems that require special attention.

The Special Committee, on the basis of the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, has repeatedly stated that factors such as territorial size, geographical location, size of population and limited natural resources should in no way prevent the peoples of the small Territories from exercising their inalienable right to self-determination and independence. Because we continue to adhere firmly to these principles, we must strive to create in the small, island Territories

(The Chairman)

the optimum conditions for the full exercise of the right to self-determination, something which would require special effort on our part and on the part of the international community as a whole.

I believe that the time has come for specific action based on specific proposals, in full observance of the rights of the peoples of those Territories. The time has come for closer dialogue with those peoples. The time has come for better cooperation with the administering Powers.

Last year, the Committee began a thorough review of its method of working, in a search for greater efficiency. In 1990 we organized two seminars which gave us the opportunity to initiate direct dialogue with the peoples concerned. Early this year the Committee set up a special working group to continue the review process, particularly in the light of the recommendations from those seminars. That working group, which was very skilfully chaired by my colleague, Ambassador Lohia, made some very important recommendations which, as you know, the Committee endorsed at its 1380th meeting, on 24 May 1991. The implementation of those recommendations will have a far-reaching effect on our work and will provide the Committee with the impetus it needs to complete its work in this last decade of the decolonization process.

(The Chairman)

During the next two weeks we shall review the conditions in the remaining Territories. We shall hear petitions and, it is to be hoped, an increased number of representatives of those Territories. We shall ask them questions in order to assess their wishes and finding out their needs. We shall listen carefully to the contributions of the administering Powers which participate in our work, and we will continue to leave the door open to those which do not. At the end of our review we shall submit recommendations to the General Assembly. However, those who have been following the work of the Subcommittees may have noted that their recommendations this year will reflect the increasing attention given by the Committee to the daily conditions and problems of the peoples of the Territories within the Committee's purview.

The need for a better knowledge of the situation in each of the Territories makes it absolutely necessary for us to continue the dialogue with the administering Powers on the question of the sending of periodic United Nations visiting missions to those Territories. While we appreciate the information which the administering Powers have provided in accordance with Article 73 e of the Charter and which, supplemented by published reports gathered by the Secretariat, has proved very useful for our annual review, we continue to believe, as experience has thus shown, that no written information can replace direct contact with the local realities. It has been said on several occasions that our documents are not always accurate, that they do not reflect the realities of the Territories. If this is the case, one may wonder why we should not be given the opportunity to learn more about those realities.

(The Chairman)

We noted through the statements of the representatives of those Territories at our seminars last year that there is a real desire for a continuing dialogue with the United Nations - with this Committee - on the part of the peoples of those Territories and many regional and non-governmental organizations. As the Committee is aware, the role of regional and non-governmental organizations in the decolonization process cannot be overemphasized. For instance, their involvement in Africa has proved particularly effective in the decolonization of that continent. We must therefore find the way to establish closer cooperation with them in the Caribbean and the Pacific, where most of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories are situated. In this connection, it was also suggested during our seminars last year that the United Nations should consider the establishment of machinery that would promote a better flow of information between the United Nations and those Territories. Concrete proposals have been made in that respect, which include, for instance, increasing the number of United Nations Information Centres in those regions.

These are a few ideas that I wanted to share with the Committee at the beginning of this August session. The Committee's effort to streamline and rationalize its work has been a continuing process since its establishment in 1961 - a process to which every member of the Committee has contributed over the years. I therefore have no doubt that members' suggestions during the next two weeks will represent a step forward in our constant search for more efficiency in the fulfilment of our mission.

(The Chairman)

Before we take up the items on the agenda on this meeting, I wish to thank the members of the two Subcommittees for the very heavy workload that they carried so successfully during our first session and whose reports we shall examine within the next few days.

I should also like to thank those representatives who, despite their otherwise busy schedules, represented the Committee at a number of meetings of intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies.

In February, Ambassador Tadesse represented the Committee at the fifty-third regular session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), held at Addis Ababa, and made a statement on behalf of the Committee, expressing the Committee's support for and solidarity with the endeavours of the OAU. The statement was well received and is reflected in the report of that session.

In March, Ambassador Tadesse made a statement on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which was held at United Nations Headquarters under the auspices of the Special Committee against Apartheid.

In late May and early June, Ambassador Lohia represented the Committee at the most recent sessions of the Council of Ministers of the OAU and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU held at Abuja. Ambassador Lohia also participated in the second regular session of the Economic and Social Council held at Geneva in July on the item relating to the implementation of the Declaration by the specialized agencies. Ambassador Lohia will submit an oral report on his participation when the Committee takes up the item.

REQUESTS FOR HEARING

The CHAIRMAN: I now wish to draw members' attention to a number of requests for hearing, which have been circulated in aides-mémoire 12/91 to 16/91, relating respectively to East Timor, the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), Guam, New Caledonia and the United States Virgin Islands. As some of the petitioners concerned will need to be informed as soon as possible of the Committee's action on their requests, I suggest that the Committee should act on these requests expeditiously.

The first group of 16 petitioners referred to in aide-mémoire 12/91 pertains to East Timor.

Mr. SRIWIDJAJA (Indonesia): At the outset, I should like to express my delegation's congratulations to you, Sir, as Vice-Chairman of the Special Committee, for chairing this Committee meeting. Through your dedicated service to the causes espoused by this body, you have earned our gratitude and appreciation. We remain confident that you will guide our collective efforts to a successful conclusion.

As in the past, I have asked to speak today in order to register our strong objection to the appearance of the persons listed in aide-memoire 12/91 of the Special Committee, dated 31 July 1991, as petitioners to speak about the so-called question of East Timor.

Indonesia's principled position in this regard is based on the incontrovertible fact that the process of decolonization in East Timor was carried out 15 years ago in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV), when the overwhelming majority of the people of East Timor chose to exercise their right of self-determination through integration with the Republic of Indonesia.

Since then, East Timor, as the twenty-seventh province of Indonesia, has been endowed with the same constitutional rights and obligations as the other provinces of our country. Any other statements made by the petitioners on the so-called question of East Timor will be regarded as internal interference in the domestic affairs of a sovereign State. Moreover, granting any petitioners the privilege to appear before the Committee to speak on East Timor would serve no useful purpose whatsoever, as the same unfounded allegations are repeated time and again. We deem the work and time of this Committee too valuable to be used in a desperate attempt to keep alive a non-issue built around a non-existent cause.

(Mr. Sriwidjaja, Indonesia)

Consequently, my delegation strongly opposes the participation of the aforementioned petitioners in the Committee's deliberations and requests that Indonesia's opposition should be reflected in the official records of this meeting.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): The reservations expressed by the representative of Indonesia will certainly be reflected in the record of the meeting. On that understanding, if there are no further comments, may I take it that the Committee agrees to accede to those requests?

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): We shall next take up the request for hearing related to the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) contained in aide-mémoire 13/91.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Committee agrees to accede to that request.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): We shall next take up the request for hearing relating to Guam contained in aide-mémoire 14/91.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Committee agrees to accede to that request as well.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): We shall next take up the request for hearing relating to New Caledonia contained in aide-mémoire 15/91.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Committee agrees to accede to that request.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): We shall next take up the request for hearing relating to the United States Virgin Islands contained in aide-mémoire 16/91.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Committee agrees to accede to that request as well.

It was so decided.

QUESTION OF SENDING VISITING MISSIONS TO TERRITORIES (A/AC.109/L.1757 and L.1758)

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): I wish to draw the attention of members to the report prepared by the Acting Chairman, contained in document A/AC.109/L.1757, setting out an account of the consultations held with representatives of the administering Powers concerned. Members also have before them in document A/AC.109/L.1758 a draft resolution on the item. During my consultations, I informed the representatives of the administering Powers that the Special Committee continued to attached the utmost importance to the dispatch of United Nations visiting missions to the Non-Self-Governing Territories as a means of securing first-hand information on those Territories.

Furthermore, it was the understanding of the Committee that a number of territorial governments had expressed their willingness to receive such missions. As regards the dispatch of United Nations visiting missions, it appeared that further consultations with the administering Powers concerned would be necessary. However, I was gratified to learn that one administering Power announced that the United Nations could be invited to send another visiting mission to the Territory administered by that Power in 1992, as soon as some technical problems were resolved.

(The Chairman)

Other administering Powers pointed out that, while they might be willing to consider the possibility of receiving United Nations visiting missions in the Territories under their administration, they considered it essential first to ascertain whether the peoples of those Territories really wanted such missions and, if so, to determine the objectives of those missions on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, it was the view of those administering Powers that a clear demonstration by the Committee of its determination to focus its efforts exclusively on the well-being of the peoples of the remaining small territories might facilitate that acceptance of such missions.

I should like to draw the attention of members to the various reforms undertaken by the Special Committee in recent months with a view to improving the Committee's efficiency and method of work, in order to be in a better position to carry out the great responsibility which the General Assembly has placed on us with regard to the implementation of the resolution on the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. We must carry out that mission, and we must maintain and further develop our dialogue with the relevant Powers on the important question of visiting missions.

Does any member wish to comment at this time on this important question of visiting missions?

Mr. LOHIA (Papua New Guinea): I take this opportunity to express, through the delegation of Ethiopia, my gratitude to the former Chairman of the Committee, Ambassador Tadesse, for the work done by himself, his delegation and his Government in the interest of colonized peoples and Territories.

Secondly, I wish to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to congratulate you on the effective manner in which you have handled the work of the Committee thus far. Thirdly, I want to say how much I appreciate your remarks, in which you referred to my personal involvement in the work of the Committee. It has always been a pleasure and an honour for my delegation to assist in the process of self-determination so that all the peoples of the world can be free.

In the context of helping to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the Committee and of the entire United Nations system, I am pleased to have participated in the consultations that brought about some reforms; we shall continue to strive for their translation into actual recommendations of the Committee, so that the Committee may be seen as effective and fruitful not only by members of the United Nations and of the Committee but also, what is more important, by the peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories. My delegation will spare no effort to ensure that our recommendations aim in that direction, that they are truly objective and that their implementation will achieve results.

In relation to visiting missions, my delegation has held consultations with a number of administering Powers. I am pleased to report that the delegations with which I have carried out consultations show willingness. It is very important that our delegations and the Committee should be given a true picture of the real situation in those Territories, in order to assist us

(Mr. Lohia, Papua New Guinea)

in formulating significant recommendations. I shall continue to work towards the maintenance of that willingness throughout the 1990s, so that we can achieve the total eradication of colonialism from the face of the earth by the year 2000.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): I reiterate my thanks to Ambassador Lohia for his outstanding work in the Committee, for serving as Chairman of one of our Subcommittees, for presiding so successfully over the special working group we created at the outset of this session, and for representing the Committee so well at important international events. In saying this, I am sure that I speak for all members.

Miss THORPE (Trinidad and Tobago): I take this opportunity, Sir, to reiterate my delegation's satisfaction at your election to the chairmanship of the Committee.

Trinidad and Tobago recognizes the value of visiting missions and supports the idea that visiting missions should be encouraged.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): The Committee will continue its consideration of this item at its next meeting.

INFORMATION FROM NON-SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): I wish to draw the attention of members to the report prepared by the Secretary-General (A/AC.109/1080). Members also have before them a draft resolution prepared by me on this question (A/AC.109/L.1759).

As there are no comments at this stage, the Committee will continue its consideration of this item at its next meeting.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): The provisional timetable for our meetings, prepared on the basis of consultations among members of the Bureau, was distributed to members on 9 July 1991. To facilitate the work of the Committee and to enable the Rapporteur to prepare and submit to the Committee his report for submission to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session by the end of August, the Committee should complete its consideration of all the items on its agenda by 15 August.

In that context, we shall adjust our timetable, taking into account where necessary the availability of the required documents, in order to make the best possible use of the services allocated to the Committee for this session. I urge members to make every effort to ensure that our meetings begin on time and to prepare their statements in keeping with our provisional timetable, with which they are familiar.

As members know, our programme for next week is heavy; it includes consideration of the reports of our Subcommittees and the hearing of petitioners from a number of Territories including New Caledonia, East Timor, the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), Western Sahara and others.

(The Chairman)

The Committee will also have to take decisions on a number of draft decisions during that same period of time.

Before adjourning, so as to facilitate our work as indicated in aide-mémoire 11/91, I wish to remind those members wishing to take part in the debates relating to the activities of foreign economic interests, to military activities and arrangements by colonial Powers in Territories and to implementation of the Declaration by the specialized agencies that they should contact the Secretariat upon the adjournment of this meeting.

The Committee has thus concluded consideration of the items on its agenda for this meeting.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held next Monday at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.